



SNIFFER - UKTAG partnership supporting the development of the UK River Basin Management Plans

Who this partnership is intended for:

UKTAG is a partnership of experts from the UK environment and conservation agencies providing technical advice to the UK Administrations, key stakeholders and Non Government Organisations. The coordination of UKTAG is managed by SNIFFER and is chaired by the Environment Agency.

Background

The EC Water Framework Directive (WFD) came into force in December 2000. It established a new, integrated approach to the protection, improvement and sustainable use of Europe's rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters and groundwaters.

The Directive introduced two key changes to the way the water environment is managed across the European Community:

- ❖ The first relates to the types of environmental objectives that must be delivered introducing new, broader ecological objectives, designed to protect and, where necessary, restore the structure and function of aquatic ecosystems themselves, and thereby safeguard the sustainable use of the water resource.
- ❖ The second key change is the introduction of a river basin management planning system, this being the key mechanism for ensuring the integrated management of all waters (groundwater; rivers; canals; lakes; reservoirs; estuaries and other brackish waters; coastal waters; and the water needs of terrestrial ecosystems that depend on groundwater, such as wetlands).

The River Basin Planning Process

The WFD requires the competent authorities to set in place regulations and processes to manage river basins based upon the ecological (and hydro-morphological) health of the water courses in that basin. In order to do this they are required to set objectives based upon the expected ecology for each "water body" (management unit) and to agree the measures that will be put in place to maintain or regain this objective.

Details of the catchment; the environmental objectives set; the pressures impacting upon the water bodies and the measures to be put in place to maintain or improve the catchment have to be laid out in a River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) by 2009. Where objectives can not be met due to excessive cost or technical infeasibility the reasons need to be laid out and alternative objectives set. Where other directives (e.g. Habitats Directive) have already set higher objectives, then these are required to be met.

All existing or new regulatory processes must be WFD compliant and the directive lays out the timeline for carrying out this process and for reporting the outcomes to Europe. The diagram shows this process for the first cycle. The process then continues on a 6 year rolling basis.

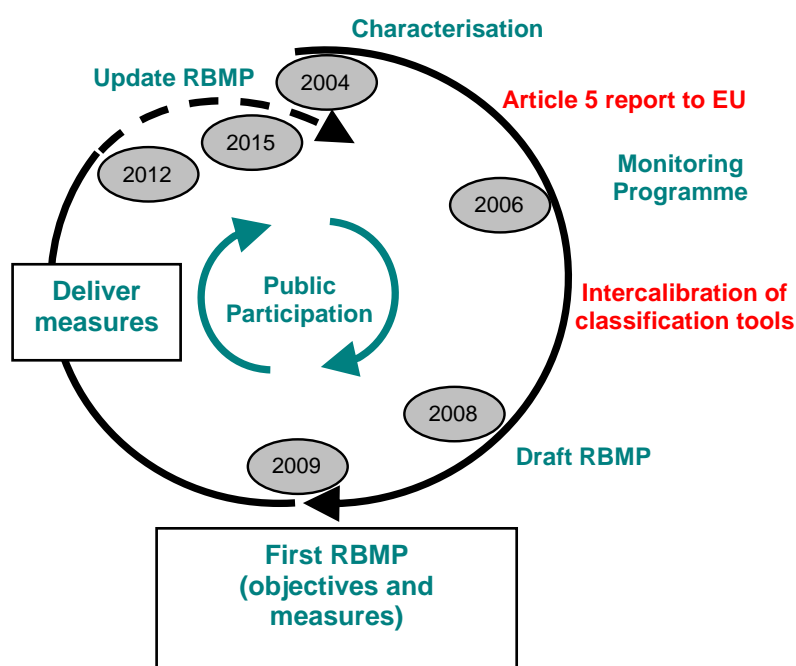


Figure 1: WFD process (first cycle)

Objectives of UKTAG

UKTAG was established in 2001 to provide coordinated advice on technical aspects of the implementation of the WFD to the UK administrations and the European Commission. The preparation of the technical guidance has been designed to facilitate consistent implementation in the UK and to assist in developing a coordinated approach to the implementation in the river basins shared between Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

SNIFFER has supported UKTAG and the agencies in co-ordinating the identification, prioritisation and delivery of WFD research.

Achievements of SNIFFER - UKTAG partnership

1. Characterisation and risk assessment

- Developed guidance on the identification of WFD waterbodies and their typologies
- Developed guidance on the assignment of water bodies to risk categories
- Developed guidance on the approach to the pressure and impact analysis on waterbodies
- Supported the development of the Article 5 reports

18 projects have been managed by Sniffer in this area, many of which underpinned the preparation of the article 5 report, others, more recently, have been adding to the refinement of the knowledge base and risk assessments.

2. Classification

- Development of a framework to classify groundwaters and surface waters (include Heavily Modified Waterbodies and Artificial Waterbodies)
- Development of new biological tools to classify for indicators of biological quality
- Intercalibration of these tools with other member states to ensure similar status boundaries are set.

28 projects have been managed by SNIFFER in developing tools or providing support to this work area.

3. Environmental Objectives

- Managed a two stakeholder reviews on the development of environmental standards
- Environmental standards covering water quality, hydrology and morphology and environmental quality standards for specific pollutants have been developed.
- Develop guidance on setting alternative objectives and preventing deterioration of status

14 projects have been managed by SNIFFER supporting the development, validation and peer review of these standards across hydrology, morphology, and groundwater and have provided funding to the agency to support three further projects developing EQS across a range of chemical parameters.

4. Programme of Measures and River Basin Management Plans

- Developed the framework for assessing the cost-effectiveness of programmes of measures
- Ensure that draft River Basin Management Plans are consistent and comparable across the UK

12 projects have been managed by SNIFFER supporting the identification of measures or developing decision support tools to assess the effectiveness of measures and worked in partnership with UKWIR on a further two projects. In addition work identifying links and possible conflicts between RBMPs and development plans has been carried out within Scotland.

5. Communication and Public Participation

- Commissioned and managed the production and maintenance of a website to support the work of UKTAG.
- Coordinated workshops within the UK and Europe on development of environmental standards and classification
- Undertook stakeholder workshops on the development of guidance on classification rules

SNIFFER, in the partnership with the agencies has supported in the development of RBMP maps (UK and Ireland) and visualisation tools to aid in the communication of complex processes to non-technical audiences.

Further Information

Copies of the research outputs are available at www.sniffer.org.uk

Copies of the UKTAG outputs are available at www.wfduk.org

The draft UK River Basin Management Plans for the UK can be found at the following links:

England and Wales -

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/33106.aspx>

Scotland - http://www.sepa.org.uk/water/river_basin_planning.aspx

Northern Ireland - <http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/wfd>

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